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SPECIAL REPORT

on Communist Propaganda

COMMUNIST REACTION TO THE ASSASSINATION OF SENATOR ROBERT KENNEDY

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COMMUNIST REACTION TO THE ASSASSINATION OF SENATOR ROBERT KENNEDY

The stock portrayal of a diseased American capitalist society, increasingly driven to violence by internal conflict and increasingly corrupted by violence, dominates communist propaganda reaction worldwide to the assassination of Senator Robert Kennedy in Los Angeles on 5 June 1968. Comment playing the associated theme that use of violence as an instrument of foreign policy goes hand in hand with lawlessness at home is predictably larded with references to U.S. "aggression" in Vietnam and intensifying dissent over the war. Beyond these standard common elements, the reactions vary in accordance with the character and propaganda practices of the respective regimes.

The harshness of Moscow's indictment of U.S. society is unrelieved by elements of warmth and sympathy for the "majority" of "sober-minded" Americans that marked the Soviet response to the assassination of President Kennedy in 1963, and the Soviet propaganda reaction to the personal tragedy this time is secondary and perfunctory. Czechoslovak and Rumanian reactions stand out as exceptionally warm toward Senator Kennedy personally, East German propaganda the most blatantly offensive in its treatment of the U.S. leadership as a whole.

Hanoi takes note of Senator Kennedy's opposition to Administration policies on Vietnam but does not address itself to the impact of his death on the U.S. political scene. Vietnamese communist comment, hinting at Administration involvement in an assassination conspiracy, suggests in one instance that a motive was to forestall further probes into the circumstances of President Kennedy's death--a suggestion raised by various other media, including (briefly) Moscow and (elaborately) Havana. Almost uniformly, communist commentators reject the idea that a single individual could be held responsible.

Peking dismisses the slaying as yet another manifestation of the "dog-eat-dog" climate of a decaying, crisis-ridden society and devotes minimal propaganda attention to the subject.

COMMUNIST REACTION TO THE ASSASSINATION OF SENATOR ROBERT KENNEDY

USSR: Broad-Ranging Indictment of "Sick," "Violent" America

Soviet propaganda's sweeping indictment of the American way of life pictures Senator Kennedy as a victim of vaguely defined "reactionary" forces resorting to "political gangsterism" in a desperate effort to retain control over a corrupt, disintegrating capitalist society.

Following the assassination of President Kennedy in November 1963, Moscow broadcast solemn music, numerous messages of condolence from Soviet leaders, and a flood of testimonials to the "outstanding American statesman" who had sought peace and Soviet-American cooperation. Expressions of grief and sympathy for the American people were coupled with expressions of concern lest the course of U.S.-Soviet detente be disturbed. Four and a half years later, reacting to the death of Martin Luther King, Moscow developed the theme of the "sick," "violent" society, though with numerous eulogies of the victim of the assassination; memorial meetings were held in the USSR, and Radio Moscow observed a moment of silence on the day of the funeral.* This time, censorious comment on the "vices" and "ulcers" of U.S. society almost wholly displaces expressions of grief, sympathy, concern, or personal tribute.

Apart from the differences in protocol dictated by the respective offices and roles of the men involved, the difference in atmosphere and thrust of the current propaganda may be viewed as a reflection both of the tensions in international relations and of Soviet propaganda's preoccupation with an intensified ideological struggle between the socialist and "imperialist" systems, against the background of intellectual restiveness in the USSR.

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* Radio Moscow devoted roughly the same amount of its comment to Senator Kennedy's death as it did to the assassination of Dr. King, about 15 percent of total comment on all subjects, in the five days following the event. More than 30 percent of Moscow's radio comment reacted to the assassination of the President in the five days after the events in Dallas.

CONDOLENCE MESSAGES

Soviet media have publicized two formal expressions of condolence--a message to Mrs. Kennedy from Kosygin on 7 June and a message to Vice President Humphrey on the same day from the chairmen of the Council of the Union and the Council of Nationalities of the USSR Supreme Soviet. Both express the Soviet people's "indignation" over the "wicked murder." The sole personal tribute is a reference to the Senator as an "eminent U.S. statesman" in the message to the Vice President.

Soviet commentators, in characterizing Senator Kennedy personally, refer to him neutrally as "a candidate" for the presidential nomination or as a relatively "sober-minded" or "realistic" U.S. politician--Moscow's customary description of the Senator in the past. Even these restrained tributes appear not in the form of testimonials but in the context of comment on the "atmosphere" in the United States that is said to have generated the murder.

THE THEME OF DECADENT CAPITALISM

Moscow's overriding focus on the ills of American society is reflected in the comments by Soviet cultural figures, who in 1963 wrote articles and poems in praise of the slain President. Now a long poem by Yevtushenko in PRAVDA attacks the United States as a land where there is "freedom to murder."

Moscow commentator Shakhov set the tone of Soviet propaganda in 1963 by praising the late President's efforts to ease tensions and his approach to domestic problems; the same commentator on 7 June 1968, in a widely broadcast commentary, uses the Senator's death as the take-off point for an unrelenting attack on the United States, concluding: "America's capitalist society corrupts the soul, the mind, and the heart of man. That is what the murder of Robert Kennedy highlights for us."

Developing the "sick" society theme, Moscow commentator Rubtsov describes the United States as a "political jungle" ruled by force--"a country that is trying to solve internal and external problems by criminal methods of violence, murder, and repressions." PRAVDA correspondent Korionov declares on 8 June that the assassination demonstrates "the foul essence of the world of modern capitalist America," where "political killings" are the "direct result of the well-planned course of monopoly circles."

Much of the comment takes the occasion to contrast the "violent" capitalist United States with the more disciplined Soviet state and to seek to discredit the U.S. right to world leadership. In the most widely beamed Moscow radio talk on the slaying, broadcast more than 60 times on 6 June, Viktor Glazunov asserts: "America, lauded as an example of Western democracy, appears before the world as a society of brutality and inhumanity. It is rooted in the very essence of the social system in America, in the very foundations of society.... Capitalism is fraught with violence, just as clouds are fraught with rain." Treating capitalism and violence as inseparable, Soviet commentators dismiss the question of gun-control legislation as essentially irrelevant.

A broadcast to North America, by Vladimir Afonin, asks "what sort of moral leadership a country can give if it is unable to protect its own political figures from assassination.... To the world, the American way of life now looks like the American way of death." Moscow domestic service commentator Babich asserts that "the most powerful and rich capitalist country in the world has no inspiring national aims, no ideals to capture the minds and hearts of the people and encourage them to accomplish great deeds." Babich directs an obvious pitch to youth: "What can such bellicose, reactionary ideology give millions of Americans, particularly young ones, who on the very threshold of their conscious life encounter profound dissatisfaction with the cult of profit taking root in their country, and encounter the cult of business, the dollar, and violence?" In contrast to the violence and decadence of capitalism, Vladimir Tregubov reassures domestic listeners, communism in the Soviet Union follows "entirely different laws, in conditions of a truly socialist democracy."

RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE CRIME

Soviet commentators place the responsibility for the assassination on "reactionary circles" and an amorphous conspiracy, usually suggesting that the Senator's comparatively "realistic" views on Vietnam and civil rights were motivating factors. TASS commentator Igor Orlov notes on 7 June that the victims of such crimes are generally leaders who oppose "rabid militarism and racism." On 8 June IZVESTIYA's political commentator Matveyev, remarking that the assassination of Senator Kennedy took place during a time of domestic and foreign political crisis, observes:

"He was in somebody's way, so he was removed by the most extreme means." IZVESTIYA commentator Kudryavtsev charges that U.S. political circles who "directed the hand" of the assassin "clearly aimed at the Vietnam policy Senator Kennedy intended to pursue if he had become President."

Mikhail Strogovich, a Soviet lawyer, in a broadcast to North America advances the theory that Senator Kennedy was killed because if he had been elected President he would have been in position to reopen the investigation of his brother's murder. This notion is not generally aired in Soviet comment, but Moscow propagandists are insistent on the point--as expressed at the conclusion of Strogovich's talk--that whatever the precise motive, the assassination "cannot be the accidental deed of an unbalanced person acting on his own."

Combining the conspiracy theme with an indictment of U.S. officialdom collectively, Korionov writes in the 8 June PRAVDA that "the shots in Dallas, Memphis, and Los Angeles were not the work of individual terrorists. They were possible first of all because forces are governing the country which stop at nothing in their intention to do away with everything that does not suit them." In a similar vein, Vladimir Paramonov writes in LIFE ABROAD that "the new American tragedy is one more indictment against the ruling circles of this power."

Apart from some references to Mayor Yorty of Los Angeles, to "fascist" organizations, and to "certain local government officials" in Los Angeles as typifying the extreme "reactionary" element, the "forces" and "circles" Moscow indicts are left vaguely identified and impersonal. President Johnson's statements and appointment of an investigative commission are reported without comment.

NATIONALITY OF THE SUSPECT

Soviet media have displayed predictable sensitivity to the fact that the suspect is an Arab immigrant. Radio Moscow did not acknowledge the arrest until 7 June, when it identified the suspect only as "Sirhan Sirhan, a Palestine Arab," and declined to speculate on his motives. On the same day, IZVESTIYA's Kondrashov accused the U.S. press of "playing on the Arab origin of the assassin" and on evidence of his "anti-Israeli attitudes" in order to shift the blame from the American way of life, "the real guilty party in the tragedy."

In a domestic service roundtable discussion on 9 June, Radio Moscow's Viktor Shragin charges that although the suspect lived "all his conscious life" in the United States, U.S. officials are trying to present him as "some kind of Arab nationalist" and are hinting that "the Reds are implicated." Calling this "an old ruse," Shragin notes a parallel with the assassination of President Kennedy in 1963, when charges of communist connections were made against Lee Harvey Oswald. IZVESTIYA's Matveyev similarly discounts allegations by Mayor Yorty that "communists were involved" in the slaying. TASS commentator Orlov notes that a U.S. Communist Party spokesman has "described Yorty's statements as a crude attempt to mislead the public in an effort to prevent a real investigation of this dirty affair and the plot behind it."

In its broadcasts to the Middle East, Moscow has publicized Kosygin's condolences and stressed the general theme of the violent capitalist society that corrupts U.S. policy at home and abroad. Sirhan Sirhan is not mentioned in available Moscow broadcasts in Arabic.

EFFECTS OF ASSASSINATION

Moscow has generally refrained so far from comment on the effects the Senator's death might have on U.S. domestic or foreign policy. PRAVDA's New York correspondents Vasilyev and Kurdyumov suggest on 11 June that there may be an effort to exploit indignation over the slaying to "take antidemocratic measures and persecute the progressive forces." In the only other available comment addressed directly to the possible consequences of the slaying, a Kondrashov article in IZVESTIYA on 8 June says it would appear that Nixon and Humphrey will be nominated, which will "leave many Americans who are dissatisfied with the Vietnam adventure no real choice." Neither Radio Moscow nor TASS carried this article.

Varied Reactions From East European Media

East European media respond with varying degrees of sympathy and expressions of shock, generally echo Moscow's portrayal of Senator Kennedy as the victim of vaguely identified "reactionary forces" in a "sick society," and largely ignore or play down the role of the murder suspect. The Czechoslovak and Rumanian reactions emerge, overall, as the most sympathetic. Yugoslav comment contains personal tributes to Senator Kennedy, along with censure of the evils of U.S. society. Polish, Hungarian, and Bulgarian comment most closely parallels Moscow's, while

East Germany's is the most blatantly hostile in its assault on the United States.

Prague media on 6 June publicized condolence messages or statements by President Svoboda, First Secretary Dubcek, Premier Cernik, Foreign Minister Hajek, National Assembly Chairman Smrkovsky, and Czechoslovak Ambassador Duda. Prague radio quoted Cernik as stating that the Senator's death had shaken him personally as well as all Czechs, and CTK cited Foreign Minister Hajek's expression of concern that his death could have an unfavorable effect on the "realistic and peace-loving forces" in the United States. Rumanian Premier Ceausescu's telegram to Mrs. Kennedy, reported by AGERPRES on 7 June, expresses grief over the death of an "eminent statesman, leader of American public life," and Bucharest media that day publicized Foreign Minister Manescu's tribute to the Senator at the U.N. General Assembly session over which he presided. Tito's message to the widow expresses great personal shock at the tragedy, calling the Senator's death "an irreparable loss to the American people and to world peace."

By contrast, Ulbricht's condolences to Mrs. Kennedy, carried by the East German news agency ADN on 6 June, are replete with an attack on the "powerful extreme reactionary circles which, in order to enforce their antihumanistic and antidemocratic objectives, are increasingly murdering their political adversaries."

THE "SICK SOCIETY"

The Budapest MAGYAR HIRLAP on 8 June headlines its editorial "Sick Society." The Budapest NEPSAVA on 8 June broadly indicts the whole U.S. leadership, declaring "the conclusion is inevitable that the supreme leadership bears responsibility for the atmosphere of bloody murders." Comment in the Warsaw TRYBUNA LUDU calls "the atmosphere of intolerance, chauvinism, nationalist pride, and social conservatism" the source "of a real American tragedy." Warsaw's comment, like Moscow's, speaks of explosion of the "myth" of American democracy, and comment from Sofia follows the standard line in denigrating the image of a free, democratic American society.

Comment from both Czechoslovakia and Rumania brings up the theme of capitalist decadence and disease, but the propaganda on this score is more limited and more restrained from both countries than from Moscow or the other East European bloc countries.

THE MOTIVES AND THE SUSPECT

East European media generally define the motive as removal of a man who disagreed with Administration policies. The Budapest MAGYAR NEMZET on 8 June is atypical in pointing out that, as attorney general, Senator Kennedy was privy to an extraordinary number of secrets: "They wanted to get rid of Robert Kennedy because he knew too much." Sofia's ZEMEDELSKO ZNAME, playing the more general theme that the motive was "to intimidate opponents of the aggressive course of the United States," is unique in suggesting that one specific objective was to impede the course of the U.S.-DRV talks in Paris.

East Germany insinuates in an authoritative commentary that President Johnson was somehow involved. A NEUES DEUTSCHLAND editorial article states on 7 June: "As for Johnson himself, perhaps he and his clan were afraid that a President Robert Kennedy might have had the true causes of the murder of John F. Kennedy investigated. So let us ask, who profits?" The article also complains that "imperialist circles," by alleging that an Arab killed Senator Kennedy, are trying to "distract the ghost of suspicion from the organizers of the murder and shift it to the main bastion of world socialism."

Polish media display some sensitivity to the background of the murder suspect. The 7 June TRYBUNA LUDU charges that U.S. publicity media are playing up the line that Sirhan Sirhan committed the crime because he is "a Jordanian nationalist"--a theory of "nationalist motives" which, the paper says, is unsupported by any evidence and has created "understandable indignation" among African and Middle East delegations at the United Nations. The Slovak Communist Party daily PRAVDA questions whether we can now believe that Sirhan Sirhan was acting from "feelings of Arab nationalism, since after five years we do not have the complete facts about the murder of President Kennedy." Rumania, for whom the question of the murder suspect would be especially sensitive, copes with the problem by ignoring it: There is no reference to the identity of the suspect in available comment.

Yugoslav commentators subscribe to the "conspiracy" theory that Senator Kennedy was murdered by reactionary rightwing forces which opposed his progressive views.

The Albanians, characteristically, present the assassination as a product of a monopoly capitalist system in a state of advanced crisis.

Hanoi Sees "Political Murder" of Administration Opponent

Hanoi and Liberation Radio both broadcast reports on 5 June on the shooting of Senator Kennedy, noted his death on the 6th, and in subsequent comment have drawn the standard picture of a "reactionary and rotten" U.S. society. A NHAN DAN commentary on the 7th goes so far as to state that assassinations "occur daily and are regarded as common events." The article adds that "the assassinations of the Kennedy brothers demonstrate the increasingly serious conflicts among American capitalists, while the murders of Luther King and other progressive U.S. people and the repression of the masses clearly point to the ever-sharpening contradictions between the laboring people and the capitalist class in the United States."

Some of Hanoi's reports on the assassination point out that Senator Kennedy was an opponent of the Administration's policies--"especially its Vietnam policy." And comment on U.S. policies, including a 7 June NHAN DAN Commentator article, cites statements by the late Senator to attack the U.S. position. The Commentator article claims that "the average American" found Senator Kennedy's assessment of the Saigon regime "more credible" than the Administration's, adding that this helped Kennedy in the primaries and "people rightly think this is precisely why Robert Kennedy has been dealt with--as his elder brother John was--by an assassin's bullets instead of by election votes." However, consistent with Hanoi's propaganda position that differences over Vietnam in the U.S. leadership are essentially superficial, the 7 June NHAN DAN commentary notes that the Senator did not favor withdrawing U.S. troops from South Vietnam, although he "stood for a peaceful settlement of the Vietnam problem" and "recognizing the NFLSV."

Responsibility of the Johnson Administration for the assassination is suggested broadly by Hanoi, more directly by Liberation Radio. An initial report on the assassination, carried by both Hanoi and Liberation Radio, recalls the assassination of President Kennedy, notes that President Johnson succeeded to the presidency and that Robert Kennedy was his "most redoubtable" Democratic opponent, and comments that "in the race for position and interests, the ruling cliques, representing the various factions

of the U.S. monopoly capitalist class, have not hesitated to resort to bloodshed and fire to liquidate one another." The 7 June NHAN DAN commentary, mentioning the arrest of the murder suspect, ridicules the idea that the murder was not the result of a conspiracy and asserts that it "doubtless was a political assassination." The paper sees "similarities" between Senator Kennedy's death and that of President Kennedy, saying "it was rumored" that Robert Kennedy, if elected President, would "bring the John Kennedy murder to light to avenge his brother." NHAN DAN adds: "People also expressed the opinion that the recent murder of Robert Kennedy might be the goal of those who wished to avoid dramatic consequences for themselves."

A 7 June Liberation Radio commentary, stating that "the person who masterminded" the assassination of President Kennedy "is yet to be found," also points to a similarity between the assassinations and asserts that "public opinion is looking for the person who masterminded this new assassination." Liberation Radio adds that "not a few people have posed questions about the role of Johnson in this murder case."

Peking Points to Deepening Crisis of "U.S. Imperialism"

CPR propaganda has devoted only negligible attention to the assassination. An NCNA report of Senator Kennedy's death on 7 June is followed by an NCNA commentary, broadcast 12 times, viewing the assassination in stock terms as still another manifestation of "the deepening political and economic crisis of U.S. imperialism." Observing that American politicians are currently engaged in a "dog-eat-dog" struggle for their respective parties' nominations, the NCNA commentary says it is standard practice to "knife each other in the back."

North Korea's reaction is essentially similar, a Pyongyang domestic service broadcast on 7 June recalling that President Kennedy, too, was shot when he was "campaigning for reelection as President, clinging to the policies of aggression and war." It concludes that "this shows how frantically the bosses of U.S. imperialism are running wild in their dogfight for power...."

Cuban Comment Plays Up Conspiracy Theory

Havana commentators play up alleged efforts to "conceal the truth" about the assassination. There are recollections of the 1963 events, charges that CIA involvement is probable, and repeated

efforts to suggest White House involvement. A typical commentary in the domestic service rejects the "naive" theory that the murderer was a lone "fanatic," since the Senator's death brought "many benefits to the Democratic Party and, within the Democratic Party, many benefits to President Johnson's candidate, Hubert Humphrey." In a similar vein, another Havana broadcast cites the Garrison investigations into the assassination of President Kennedy, alleges that "the name of President Johnson began to crop up" in these investigations, and concludes that the answer to the question "who benefits from the death of another Kennedy?" should be sought "in Washington, in the White House." Havana comment on 6 June, while the Senator still lay wounded, noted that "trial balloons" were being sent up on President Johnson's "possible candidacy" for reelection.

"Imperialist propaganda" is accused of vainly seeking scapegoats for the murder. The Voice of America is quoted as having tried to link the "presumed murderer with communist organizations." Pointing out that the accused "Jordanian" was "from the occupied zone of Jerusalem," a commentary in the domestic service says "North American propaganda" is trying to "make public opinion believe Kennedy's murder was due to the nationalist sentiments of an Arab." The commentator suggests that an effort is being made to exploit the coincidence of the assassination with the anniversary of "Israel's aggression against the Arab states."

Insisting that the assassination was "not an isolated act," Havana calls it "the natural product of a society in full decomposition, convulsed by violence, by a criminal violence, whose most prominent conveyers are the men who make up the clique of war criminals holding the power in Washington." There are the predictable linkages to the war in Vietnam, "where the United States without any right uses force in its most brutal forms." Commenting on President Johnson's statement following the shooting, one propagandist says the President "has no right to condemn violence because he is the first to use it, raising it to the level of the mainstay of his foreign policy."